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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 37th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. TSHERING (Bhutan)

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* Items which the Committee has decided to consider together.

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The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 110: PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN (continued) (A/50/163, A/50/215-S/1995/475, A/50/456, 537, 672 and 673)

AGENDA ITEM 111: PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES OF THE INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE (continued) (A/50/511, 565 and 673)

1. Mr. NIKIFOROV (Russian Federation) said that the efforts undertaken in various countries and regions to protect indigenous peoples and involve them in the life of society had unfortunately not radically improved their situation. The United Nations therefore must play a leading role as a centre for coordinating international cooperation in that field. From its very inception, the Russian Federation had pursued a policy to end the historic injustice with regard to its indigenous people. His Government had established a national organizing committee for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People as a mechanism for cooperating with the country's indigenous people in implementing the Decade's programme of activities. The Committee was currently preparing a national programme for the Decade. Moreover, a fund was being set up to support activities for the Decade. The Russian Federation would also carry out such tasks as improving its legislation on the rights of indigenous people and bettering their social and economic situation.

2. In the establishing of a permanent forum for indigenous people within the United Nations system, account should be taken, first and foremost, of the views and proposals of those people, who should participate to the greatest extent possible in the consultations. Through the Working Group on Indigenous Populations of the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, representatives of indigenous people would have an opportunity to express their views on questions of the greatest significance to them. In that connection, he expressed satisfaction at the innovative procedure adopted by the Commission of Human Rights in resolution 1995/32 to broaden participation by organizations of indigenous people in the Working Group on a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous people.

3. Mr. TRAORE (Guinea) said that it was time for the international community to honour its commitments undertaken at the 1990 World Summit for Children by placing the needs and rights of children at the very centre of its development strategy. Although appreciable progress had been made in achieving the objectives of the Summit, improving the situation of children throughout the world was still a challenge that had to be met.

4. Since the 1980s Africa had been undergoing an economic and social crisis compounded by a political and institutional crisis. Corrective measures based on structural adjustment programmes often had painful consequences for vulnerable groups, including children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child had been ratified by Guinea in 1990 and was incorporated in its national legislation. In 1992, a national action plan for children had been drawn up with a view to ensuring the survival, protection and development of mothers and children; it contained priority objectives to be achieved by the year 2000. In

1994, the Government had established a Ministry for the Advancement of Women and Children.

5. With the support of UNICEF, his Government had also drawn up an intermediate action plan for children for the period 1993 to 1995, which laid down objectives to be achieved in the field of infant mortality, public health, nutrition, basic education, drinking water and sanitation.

6. In order to meet the special needs of children in difficult situations, a number of steps were planned, including the establishment of a national committee to monitor protection of the rights of the child, training for social workers to enable them to plan and carry out projects for children, the elaboration of a national programme for children in difficult situations and improvement of the ability of non-governmental organizations to operate in that field and take new initiatives. The Committee would publicize the objectives of the Convention, ensure its implementation and encourage parental responsibility. Lastly, he commended the work of UNICEF, FAO, WHO, ILO and the World Bank in mobilizing the necessary resources for his country's national action plan for mothers and children.

7. Mr. NAJEM (Lebanon) said that, since the end of the war in Lebanon in 1990 and the beginning of reconstruction, many problems had arisen, particularly with regard to children. Lebanese children had been severely affected by the war, in terms of their development, their social relationships and their understanding of basic values. There were currently more than 1 million children in Lebanon, all facing, to varying degrees, the social and economic after-effects of the war, including poverty, displacement, water pollution, environmental degradation and the destruction of health-care facilities, schools and nurseries. They were currently in need of special care and a healthy and peaceful environment in which to lead a normal life. Over the past five years, the Government had taken numerous measures to improve the economic situation and find appropriate ways of developing the whole country, which included the establishment of the Ministry of Social Affairs in 1993.

8. Lebanon had signed the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It had collaborated with UNICEF in preparing a national plan for implementation of the Convention through the amendment of national legislation. Lebanon had made progress in the sphere of the rights of the child with the help of many United Nations bodies and local and international non-governmental organizations, which had cooperated in promoting the rights of the child, and had realized important achievements, such as elimination of the term "illegitimate child" from the identity card, and the separation of juvenile from adult offenders in different prisons. Lebanon greatly appreciated the various forms of assistance provided by UNICEF and other United Nations bodies in that sphere.

9. Great progress had been made in the field of health. The national vaccination programme, begun in 1987 and coordinated between UNICEF, local clinics and WHO, had greatly helped to prevent polio and measles, and further progress was expected.

10. With regard to education, in 1993 the Government had launched a new initiative to expand higher educational facilities. With help from UNICEF, it was working hard to rehabilitate school buildings in all parts of the country. In cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs, UNICEF had also organized extremely successful children's education camps.

11. He reiterated the Lebanese Government's concern to strengthen and protect the rights of the child and its attempts to establish peace in the country. He urged all relevant United Nations bodies, international organizations and non-governmental organizations to follow up their valuable work and expand their programmes in Lebanon, since the Lebanese child was in very great need of such assistance.

12. Mr. HETTIARACHCHI (Sri Lanka) said that his Government had taken a number of measures to eradicate child prostitution and child pornography. A national task force was actively combating child prostitution; and new legislation had been passed in August 1995 amending the Penal Code and increasing punishment for rape, prostitution and related offences. Measures had been taken to increase the awareness of the general public and officials with regard to those issues. Public awareness programmes had proved to be very effective in creating the necessary climate for combating abuses against children.

13. Sri Lanka was deeply concerned about children affected by armed conflicts. An armed secessionist group in the country had been engaged in terrorist acts against successive popularly elected Governments. The militants, who claimed to represent an ethnic minority, had conscripted children as young as 10 years of age to wage war and even carry out suicide missions. Sri Lanka would soon have to face the challenge of overcoming the terrible legacy of distorted young minds, broken families and interrupted lives that the conflict would leave behind. In that context, his delegation felt that the progress report on the study on the impact on children of armed conflict (A/50/537) was a useful starting-point for concerted action and looked forward to the final report. Lastly, Sri Lanka supported the idea of drawing up an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts.

14. Mr. FREEDMAN (International Labour Office) said the International Labour Organization (ILO) was particularly concerned about child labour, which was now at the top of its agenda. Ever since its creation in 1919, ILO had taken a definite stand against that phenomenon by adopting a number of conventions governing the minimum age of employment. Its fight against child labour had evolved from standard-setting to a wide-ranging programme that included technical cooperation with member States.

15. The number of working children between the ages of 5 and 14 was growing in many parts of the world. ILO had estimated their number in 1990 at 78.5 million, but actual numbers might be far higher. Moreover, too many children worked too many hours, thereby being deprived of education and the opportunity to acquire literacy and other skills on which future productive employment would depend. There was evidence that 50 to 70 per cent of child workers combined work with school, but their fatigue could affect their education, in addition to being a major cause of accidents. Certain occupations

exposed children to physical hazards including high levels of lead and mercury and infections such as tetanus and skeletal deformities from heavy lifting, while others could cause them serious psychological and social harm.

16. One such occupation was domestic service, mainly involving a large number of girl children, who routinely worked very long hours under pressure and in almost total isolation from family and friends. There was evidence of widespread physical, mental and sexual abuse of children working in domestic service. Another very serious problem was that of child slavery: a large number of child slaves were found in agriculture, domestic service, the sex industry, the carpet and textile industries, quarrying and brick-making.

17. Poverty was the single greatest cause of child labour, and clearly the root causes of poverty had to be addressed. Many countries recognized that the widespread exploitation of children seriously undermined their national economic and social development objectives and were seeking ILO assistance in that respect.

18. The International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour had become the operational arm of ILO in that sphere, and was currently operating in 11 countries. The collective lessons of experience in the field had helped to establish guidelines on how to tackle the problem. There was a need to create a broad social alliance against child labour, and to find out more about its scale, nature and effects at the country level. ILO had developed a rapid-assessment technique and a statistical survey methodology for that purpose. Each Government should design a national plan of action to prevent child labour and protect working children. Priority should go to eliminating the participation of children in economic activities conducted under conditions resembling slavery, particularly when those were hazardous or abusive. Awareness campaigns should be conducted through the media, at schools and in the workplace.

19. There was a need to create the institutional capacity to coordinate government action, support initiatives at local levels and provide adequate training to staff working in the child-labour field. ILO had developed a training package on the design, management and evaluation of child-labour projects. In view of the need to coordinate the fight against child labour throughout the United Nations system, ILO was actively cooperating with other international organizations, especially UNICEF, at central and field levels.

20. With regard to the programme of activities for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, ILO had adopted the only international legal instrument addressing the question of the living and working conditions of indigenous and tribal peoples, the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention of 1989, which recognized that such peoples had a unique cultural identity, and stressed the need to involve them in the making of decisions that would affect their future.

21. Among the activities of ILO described in the Secretary-General's report (A/50/565), he wished to highlight two because of their significance. In Guatemala, ILO had helped to negotiate the peace plan, which had made special provision for the protection of and assistance to the indigenous peoples of the

country. Secondly, through a new interregional project covering several countries and financed by the Danish Government, ILO sought to promote the rights of and combat poverty among indigenous peoples. The project included training for indigenous organizations and supportive non-governmental organizations as well as judges and lawyers on indigenous and tribal rights under national legislation and international standards; it also covered land and resource rights, support for revising regulations, and the extension of service programmes such as credit, marketing and management.

22. ILO defended and respected the multi-ethnic and multicultural character of indigenous and tribal peoples as an important component of political stability and social progress.

The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.